



Recovery Efforts Retain Historic Gilbertsville

Full Mitigation Best Practice Story

Otsego County, New York

Albany, NY – History is of particular importance to the estimated 350 residents of Gilbertsville. It is one of only a few villages nationwide to be placed, in its entirety, on the National Register of Historical Places. With additional help from federal and state disaster agencies, the tiny Otsego County Village of Gilbertsville is rebuilding from the June 2006 floods without having to sacrifice one of its most historically significant features.



One of the prominent features of the district is a 200-foot-long manmade channel of laid-up, cut stone that carries the Dunderburg Brook through the center of the community. During the severe storms of June 26 - 28, 2006 the usually placid brook roared through the ravine, cresting several feet above it, flooding homes and businesses.

The morning's customers at the general store in the 1894 Gilbert Building on Commercial Drive remember vividly the events of the flood. The business district – which includes the general store, the Post Office, a quilt shop, several artist studios, and library – runs parallel to the brook.

"I got the call just after midnight. Everyone in town was out, moving what they could to higher ground," recalled Dorothy Kelly, the store's manager, "We served coffee well into the next day."

Adds store employee Joanne Gile, "It was a wild night."

The historic retaining wall, which varies from 6 to 14 feet in height, held through the flood but was structurally compromised. Some sections of stone, which had otherwise held for more than a century, were washed away.

Temporary bracing has since been put in place to stop the wall from falling further inward, but village officials found that permanent repairs will be much more costly.

When Otsego and 18 other counties in the region were declared eligible for federal disaster assistance last June, it triggered the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Public Assistance (PA) program. The program provides reimbursement to government entities and certain non-profits for repair of damaged public infrastructure.

FEMA provides 75 percent of the funding, and New York State funds the remaining 25 percent. The program is administered by the New York State Emergency Management Office (SEMO).

Additional funding is available from FEMA through its hazard mitigation program, which encourages, and pays for, preventative measures.

Restoring the Dunderburg retaining wall to its original, historic state will require first removing and then replacing the damaged sections with concrete and then re-facing the wall with laid-up stone. In order to mitigate future damages, riprap is being placed to line the streambed beyond the retaining wall to prevent future erosion.

In all, the cost of the project is estimated at \$1.378 million, according to FEMA.

"The wall is an important part of the village," said Mayor Shirley Musson, "and it should be preserved."

Mayor Musson worked with FEMA and state officials to secure the funding to return the wall to its original, historic state and to mitigate future damages. In late February, Senator Charles Schumer announced FEMA had approved more than \$1 million in public assistance for the project.

Musson said the project is now being bid, and she hopes the work will be completed by the end of November.

"FEMA officials were super," said the mayor, "They bent over backwards for us."

Activity/Project Location

Geographical Area: **Single County in a State**

FEMA Region: **Region II**

State: **New York**

County: **Otsego County**

City/Community: **Gilbertsville**

Key Activity/Project Information

Sector: **Public**

Hazard Type: **Flooding**

Activity/Project Type: **Retrofitting, Structural**

Structure Type: **Concrete, Reinforced**

Activity/Project Start Date: **07/2007**

Activity/Project End Date: **11/2007**

Funding Source: **Other FEMA funds/ US Department of Homeland Security**

Funding Recipient: **Local Government**

Funding Recipient Name: **Village of Gilbertsville**

Activity/Project Economic Analysis

Cost: **\$1,378,000.00 (Actual)**

Activity/Project Disaster Information

Mitigation Resulted From Federal
Disaster? **Yes**

Federal Disaster #: **1692 , 04/24/2007**

Value Tested By Disaster? **No**

Repetitive Loss Property? **Unknown**

Reference URLs

Reference URL 1: **<http://www.fema.gov/hazard/flood/index.shtm>**

Reference URL 2: **<http://www.floodsmart.gov>**

Main Points

- With help from federal and state disaster agencies, the Otsego County Village of Gilbertsville is rebuilding from the June 2006 floods without having to sacrifice one of its most historically significant features.
- During the severe storms of June 26 - 28, 2006 the Dunderburg Brook roared through the 200-foot-long manmade channel of laid-up, cut stone flooding homes and businesses.
- The historic retaining wall, which varies from six to 14 feet in height, held through the flood but was structurally compromised.
- Temporary bracing has since been put in place to stop the wall from falling further inward, but village officials found that permanent repairs will be much more costly.
- When Otsego and 18 other counties in the region were declared eligible for federal disaster assistance last June, it triggered the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Public Assistance (PA) program.
- Restoring the wall to its original, historic state will require first removing and then replacing the damaged sections with concrete and then re-facing the wall with laid-up stone.
- To mitigate future damages, riprap is being placed to line the streambed beyond the retaining wall to prevent future erosion.
- In all, the cost of the project is estimated at \$1.378 million, according to FEMA.



A section of the century-old retaining wall that suffered damaged.



Temporary bracing holds the historic stone retaining wall.